

**REVIEW ARTICLE**

**Education: A catalyst for Women Empowerment in Nigeria**

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***Abstract***

*This paper examines the place of education as a catalyst for women empowerment in Nigeria. The paper, using primary and secondary sources of data, has shown that in spite of all the laudable goals and objectives of education, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. The paper therefore recommends, among others, the involvement of women in educational policy formulation, extensive enlightenment campaigns, the discarding of stereotypical division of work into men's and women's job, and women must organize themselves to meet the challenges of a positive and meaningful role in the struggle for personal and national emancipation, development and progress.*

**INTRODUCTION**

In all countries of the world, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development.. It is a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country resolves. In fact, the (Nigeria's) National Policy on Education (1981:6) indicates that education is the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, Having recognized education as "an instrument per-excellence for effective national development" as well as "a

dynamic instrument of change," it is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. Education empowers women by improving their living standard. It is the starting point for women's advancement in different fields of human endeavor. It is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfill their role as full members of the society (Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, 1985). In fact, the educational empowerment of Nigerian women is the spring board to every other form of empowerment (political, social, economic etc).

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As citizens of this great nation who form a great percentage of the population, women in Nigeria are expected to contribute their quota to the development of their country. For individual and national development, it is crucial that girls and female adults should acquire or have formal education. Unfortunately, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels. In spite of all the laudable goals and objectives of education, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. As much as 61% of the Nigerian Women's 44 million population (1991 Census) suffer from intellectual poverty (Ojuolape, 2000). Early history of education in Nigeria showed that women lacked easy access to formal education. By 1965, 37.7% of pupils in primary schools were girls while only 9% of under-graduates were female students (Sanni, 2001). The figure rose to 25.5% by 1974 and the students were mainly enrolled in such courses as teaching and the Social Sciences. The available figures indicate that the total full time enrolment of females in the University stood at 50,652 as against male population of 138,334 in 1992 (Federal Office of Statistics, Abuja, 1994).

It is also remarkable and significant to note that the early educational curriculum was designed to train women as teachers, nurses, and clerks. They were not in medicine, politics, engineering, law and environmental studies (Achume, 2004). This obviously resulted in shortage of qualified women for top level leadership posts. In other words, majority of women/females are still not being trained and employed in areas that will enhance their chances at competing for position in public life. As can be expected, this low level of female education worsens the

imbalance of power that has been existing between the sexes. One of the legacies of this is the absence of the female equivalence of the male political class.

The plight of women's education in Nigeria is such that provisions for improving women's participation had to be made in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. Section 3, paragraph 11 of the national policy states thus:

*With regard to women's education, special efforts will be made by Ministries of Education and Local Government Authorities in conjunction with Ministries of Community Development and Social Welfare and information to encourage parents to send their daughters to school.*

The Nigerian Government had taken several practical steps to improve women's participation in education by establishing a full-fledged Women's Education Section under the Federal Ministry of Education in 1986. It has been well observed by Alao and Ajayi (1989:8) that after more than twenty years of the existence of the Women's Education Section in the Federal Ministry of Education, women's education is still in dire need of improvement. It is this paradox that has formed the purview of this paper.

This paper, therefore, seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To argue for the introduction and nurturing of educational programmes which will galvanize the empowerment of women of all categories in Nigeria, irrespective of creed or religious beliefs and cultural inclination?
- (b) To highlight the factors inhibiting women's education which have contributed significantly towards

female mass illiteracy in Nigeria; and

- (c) To proffer suggestions for the establishment and running of educational programmes for the Nigerian women which would definitely lift them up from the abyss of ignorance, poverty, total dependency on spouses, inferiority complex, lack of self confidence and depression etc.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey method was employed in order to investigate the role of education as a catalyst for women empowerment in Nigeria. The data was generated through interview and documentary analysis. Interview was conducted with officials from the Federal and State Ministries of Education. The researcher is also a senior member of academic staff in Nigeria and now in Ethiopia. In addition to this source of data, documents and previous studies on education and women empowerment were reviewed. The research, therefore, relied, in addition to the primary sources, on secondary sources of data which include journals, textbooks, seminar papers, magazines, bulletins, newspapers, and periodicals. A qualitative data analysis technique was employed in order to analyze the responses from the unstructured interview and related documents. Conclusions in this study were arrived at using analysis of the existing data and responses from the interviewees.

## 3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. Empirical Literature

This section clarifies the concept of education and women empowerment. It also examines the gap between the literacy level of male gender and that of the female gender. The benefits women derive from educational ventures and

constraints inhibiting women's education in Nigeria are also dealt with in this section.

(a) **Education:** Okafor (1984) defines education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and thereby achieve his perfect self-fulfillment. Education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult (male or female) develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enables him to function effectively as a member of the society. Education helps one to maximize his physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful for him and his society. In this sense, women education means the process by which women acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society.

(b) **Women Empowerment:** Perhaps there are as many definitions of women empowerment as are authors' empowerment. Sako (1999:32) defines empowerment as:

*The process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups in society so as to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. It involves the provision of enabling environment for their productive and intellectual abilities to be realized. In some societies where some groups have suffered discrimination for a long time, ways have been found to address this problem. Laws*

*have been made to protect these groups against future discrimination with the goal of providing equal opportunities for all.*

Fadeiye and Olanegan (2001:66) viewed women empowerment as:

*A process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. ...That women should be looked at as individuals that possess some hidden potentials for greatness and so should be encouraged to develop such to the fullest.*

Enemuo (1999:233), quoting Sandbrook and Halfani, viewed empowerment as:

*multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. In the specific case of women, empowerment entails not only positive changes in these critical respects but also the dismantling of the cultural norms and traditional practices that devalue, disempower and dispossess women. The process must necessarily also include the expansion of women's access to educational opportunities, facilities for skills acquisition and positions of authority.*

For the purpose of this study, it is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. In the specific case of women, empowerment entails not only positive changes in these critical respects but also the dismantling of the cultural norms and traditional

practices that devalue, dis-empower and dispossess women. It means giving traditional and legal status to the efforts of women to develop and contribute to the creation of wealth, taking and participating in decision making of their families and societies at large and to reduce their present state of vulnerability, decrease dependency and passivity and be at the centre, not at the periphery.

### 3.2. Contributions of Educated Women in National Development

The benefits derivable from education include the following: enhancement of the quality of living-food, housing, health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. If the vast majority of our women folk are educated, their personal development can be enhanced remarkably. Children and husbands also stand to gain tremendously. Women are likely to have more confidence in themselves and their ability to contribute effectively to national development.

**Marital Obligation:** Education helps in the fulfillment of women's obligation. A married woman is expected to take care of her home – husband and children. She is expected to use whatever knowledge and skills she has to cook, clean and rear her children – there is no doubt that a woman who is able to read about health care, nutrition, body changes, modern household equipment, etc, will perform creditably well her God-given responsibility to the home and society at large.

An educated woman will be able to help her children with their school assignments. She may also go beyond that to further enlighten them in their school work, attend Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and inquire about the academic performances of her children.

This will ensure blissful homes, well-educated and well-behaved children and contented husbands and an endowed nation.

**Agricultural Development:** Half of the world's populations are women and two-third of the work is done by them. About 75 percent of agricultural output in Africa is produced through women's efforts (Adeyeye, 1987). Ironically the people that participate most in agricultural production are the least educated. Therefore, provision of basic literacy and skill acquisition for illiterate females will no doubt ensure bumper agricultural production.

**Health:** Mothers help in no small measure in securing perfect health for the children and by so doing for the entire community and nation. Attaining good health starts right from the womb. It starts from the pregnant mother knowing and taking what constitute balanced diet, abstaining from damaging drugs, and actions inimical to the health of the baby. A woman can beware of all these harmful conditions if she is educated, since most enlightenment campaigns against diseases are transmitted either through the radio, television, newspapers, posters, pamphlets or magazines or in the local languages or English language. If women are educated they will have knowledge of basic health care and will be in a position to help others to maintain and improve their own health.

**National Reconstruction:** If women are educated, they will be able to assist in nation building and reconstruction. A few women are currently holding powerful positions in our country and in the world. There is still room for improvement if more women are educated. Perhaps with more women holding the mantle in a male-dominated political arena, the socio-political state of affairs, the world over, will definitely improve.

**Social Development:** The improvement of society could be effected through the development of the potentialities of the women folk. The 1978 General Conference of UNESCO meeting said:

*Increasing educational opportunities for women boosts equity and fosters national development. The potential contribution of educated and trained women to labour force and the importance of their education in the improvement of family welfare and planning are factors still under-estimated in national development.*

It is also pertinent to mention here that the higher the level of education, the greater the likelihood that a women will stay in the labour force. The participation of women with university degrees is more than double that of women who have only primary education. This creates an ever-increasing pool of experienced and skilled personnel and from which supervisory and management positions can be filled.

**Economic Development:** In the economic sphere, most women engage in small scale or large scale businesses. Also, women who are married to entrepreneurs and big time businessmen will be able to help such husbands if educated; they will be able to converse with such husbands intelligently and offer useful advice to them concerning their jobs. Such women will be able to deal with their husbands' business partners, friends and other highly placed associates without the slightest feeling of inferiority or shame. Furthermore, if women are educated and are gainfully employed, they can assist their husbands in financing the home and the education of their children.

### 3.4. Theoretical Framework of Analysis.

This study is anchored on the systems theory. In its simplest sense, "systems" has been defined as a set of assemblage of things connected, or inter-dependent, so as to form a complete unity, a whole composed of parts in orderly management according to some scheme or plan. In a more pragmatic sense, it is "any combination of human and material resources, including the organization and procedures required to coordinate their functioning employed to achieve a mission or objective.

A system usually has many attributes, which can be summarized thus:

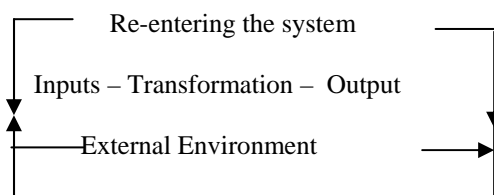
(a) A system can be perceived as a whole with parts and their inter - dependent relationship;

(b) Systems have subsystems and are also part of a supra system, a system can be regarded as either open or closed. A system is regarded as open if it exchanges information, energy or material with its environment, as happens with biological or social (like a company) systems; it is regarded as closed if it does not have such interactions with the environment.

(c) A system interacts with its environment in terms of a process that involves inputs, conversion, and output of energy, information and materials.

(d) A system tends to re-energize or modify itself through the process of information feedback from the environment as illustrated in the Figure 1 below:

**Fig. 1**  
**Systems Theory**



*Source: Harold Koontz et al., Management, McGraw Hill International Book Coy; 1980, P. 24.*

The justification for using the systems theory is premised on the fact that Nigeria (the whole) is made up of male and female population (parts). If education is accepted as a dynamic instrument for change and an instrument per excellence for effecting national development, then both gender (male and female) must be given equal educational opportunities.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Literacy Gap between the Male Gender and Female Gender in Nigeria

Having established the importance of education in national development, it is apposite to maintain that the girl-child or

the female gender has been dastardly affected. Within the literacy limit, the literacy level of boys or the male gender far exceeds that of the female gender. Since the female gender metamorphoses into the women folk, the literacy level among Nigerian women has been very low compared to that of men. Nigeria women occupy very low educational status compared with their male counterparts. According to Singh et al (1992) about 70% of the adult female population is illiterate. This is compared to adult male illiteracy of 46%. Despite efforts at increasing the supply of female education through massive campaign, building of more schools, subsidies for female pupils etc, the demand for female

education is still very low (Odili et al, 2000). Gender disparity (with girls and women as the disadvantaged) is a well-known feature of Nigeria's educational landscape. This has often been compounded by geographical and social disparities, with the disadvantaged states and the socially disadvantaged groups in the population bearing a heavier burden of gender inequality (Education Today, 2000).

In the Nigerian setting, the circumstances of gender have strongly interacted with culture to produce sex role, stereotypes and demands which have enormously influenced the attitudes of males and females to many issues including Science, Technology and Mathematics (STM) education. Onyemelukwe (1995) reported that sex difference in the performance of students (boys and girls) in some school subjects could be attributed to a variety of factors such as gender and attitude. In view of the above, Okeke (1990) identified some obstacles encountered by female in education to include the followings:

Lack of support from educational policy makers,

- (a) Differential socialization patterns for boys and girls at early stages of life,
- (b) Limited access to education of girls,
- (c) Sex differences in the quality of education experiences for boys and girls,
- (d) Perceived irrelevance of school for girls,
- (e) Absence of career education; and
- (f) Masculine image of education.

While males and females have been theoretically afforded equal access to education, traditional social attributes about the appropriateness of education for young Nigerian women are not apt to change so rapidly towards social equality of the sexes. In general, girls and women have made steady progress in all areas of formal education in Nigeria since independence in 1960, enrollment rates have risen at all levels of education, drop-out rates have fallen while the government continues to make constant efforts to improve the quality of education that is received. Female education, however, still lags behind that of males in many respects. For instance, female enrolment rates at all the levels of formal education remain below those of male; girls have a higher drop-out rate; girls are much fewer in the important subject areas of science, technology and mathematics, and their career choice is still largely confined to the 'feminine' areas of teaching, nursing, secretarial studies, catering, etc.

As Nigeria pursues and prosecutes the lofty goal of educational advancement in the millennium, findings reveals that gender inequality still characterized the educational advancement of the country. From primary school level to the university, gender inequality subsists as more males are admitted to the tertiary educational level than females. A brief examination of developments in each of the sub-levels of formal education will illustrate the situation.

**Table 1: Primary School Enrolment Nigeria by Sex (1960-1995)**

Year	Total	Male	%	Female	%
1960	2,912,618	1,829,471	52.81	1,083,147	37.1
1965	2,911,742	1,791,563	61.5	1,120,179	38.5
1970	3,515,598	2,216,000	63.2	1,299,598	37.0
1975	6,165,547	3,540,486	57.4	2,625,061	42.6
1980	13,760,030	7,789,786	56.4	5,970,244	43.4
1985	12,914,870	7,182,552	55.6	5,732,318	44.2
1990	13,007,249	7,729,677	56.8	5,877,572	43.8
1991	13,776,854	7,741,897	56.2	6,034,957	43.8
1992	14,805,937	8,273,824	55.9	6,532,113	44.1
1993	15,870,280	8,930,600	56.3	6,939,680	43.7
1994	16,190,947	9,056,947	55.9	7,134,582	44.1
1995	15,741,078	8,729,421	55.5	7,134,682	44.5

Source: Statistics Branch, Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja

**Table 2: Secondary School Enrollment in Nigeria by Sex 1990-1995**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Total Enrollment	2,901,993	3,123,227	3,600,620	4,032,083	4,451,329	4,448,991
Total males	1,661,468	1,821,307	1,979,045	2,182,034	2,419,782	2,354,713
Enrolment	(57.25%)	(58.31%)	(54.0%)	(54.0%)	(54.0%)	(52.9%)
Total female	1,240,525	1,301,970	1,621,575	1,850,049	2,031,547	2,094,279
Enrolment	(42.75%)	(41.69%)	(46.0%)	(46.0%)	(46.0%)	(47.1%)

Source: Statistics Branch, Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja

**Table 3: Number of Male – Female in Nigerian Universities by Faculty 1986/87 Academic Year**

Faculty	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Administration	7492	1373	8869	15.47
Agriculture	7469	1618	9087	17.81
Arts	13543	6712	20255	33.14
Earth and Mining Sciences	495	66	564	11.71
Education	17419	10759	28178	37.18
Engineering Technology	11708	847	12555	6.75
Environment Design	4693	678	5371	12.62
Law	6955	2136	9691	23.50
Medicine / Health Sciences	7423	2433	9856	24.69
Pharmacy	1398	597	1995	29.92
Social Sciences	14046	3342	18288	18.27
Natural Sciences	15785	5414	21199	25.54
Veterinary Medicine	1144	148	1292	11.46
Basic / Remedial Studies	3167	846	4013	21.08
Total	113645	36968	150613	24.55

Source: National University Commission annual Report, Abuja (1987, P. 27).



**Year Table 4: Number of Male-Female in Nigerian Universities by Faculty (2003/2004) Academic Year.**

Faculty	Male	Female	% female
Admin/Management Sciences	56217	28551	33.68
Agriculture	27755	12152	30.45
Arts	48946	25214	33.99
Education	64739	33992	34.42
Engineering / Technology	48332	12607	20.68
Environmental Science	22813	6922	23.27
Law	20949	12097	36.60
Medicine	27198	14791	35.22
Pharmacy	4150	2067	33.24
Science	92065	44606	48.45
Social Science	72133	36387	33.53
Veterinary Medicine	2517	695	21.03
Dentistry	1560	840	35.00

Source: National University Commission Data Bank, Abuja.

**Table 5: Undergraduate Enrolment in Nigerian Universities (2000 – 2005 Academic Years)**

Year	Male	Female	Total	% Female
2000 – 2001	231633	127125	358758	35.43
2001 – 2002	274131	170818	444949	38.39
2002 – 2003	373778	232326	606194	38.37
2003 – 2004	489276	231117	720393	32.08
2004 – 2005	466159	258697	724856	35.68

Source: National University Commission Data Bank, Abuja

**Table 6: Total Enrolment Male – Female by University Status (2003 – 2004 Academic Year)**

University	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Federal	342833	151437	493270	30.49
State	132889	69882	202771	34.46
Private	10401	9250	19651	47.07

Source: National University commission Data Bank, Commission Data Bank, Abuja.

In 1986 / 87 academic year, only 24% of the universities spaces were filled by women. More than a decade later, the scenario made a slight adjustment moving up to 35%. The average annual growth rate for women enrolment into the universities is only 0.6%. Within the period 1986/87 to 2004/2005 academic year, growth rate had been unsteady. In 2001 – 2002 academic year, women recorded an increased enrolment of 38%, which is the highest within the period under review. Subsequent years were less, with the lowest record being in the year 2003 - 2004 academic year. Table 6, which shows the male – female enrolment in 2003/2004 academic year, across the three categories of universities in Nigeria also paints a marginalized picture. The Federal universities with over 60% enrolment had the list percentage of women intakes while private universities with the list enrolment had the highest women percentage. It still points to the fact that women are poorly represented in our universities.

Thus, the educational gap between men and women is still very wide with women far behind. In this wise, the equity question may not be successfully addressed as education is expected to be a leveler. The proportion of gender discrimination in school and labour market is ranked highest in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, statistics show that in 1985, 48% males, 70% females, 40% males, 63% females (1990), and 26% males, 43% females (2001) were illiterates (World Bank, 2003). The trend showed that the girl-child is denied education in some parts of the country. In the same vein, National Population Commission (NPC) (2001), observed that there were more literates males (65.7%) than female (47.8%).

#### **4.2. Economic and Socio-Cultural Factors Impinging on Women's Education in Nigeria**

At this juncture, we shall examine the economic and social cultural factors impinging on women's education in Nigeria.

**Economic Constraints:** For economic reasons, many parents consider women's education as a waste of funds. Such parents believe that money spent on a girl's education is a waste, since she will soon marry into her husband's family, thus leaving only boys in their original family to cater for their parents. Therefore, when families are faced with the option of choosing between sons' and daughters' education, the daughters are always the victims.

**Male Chauvinism:** Another factor impinging on women's education is male chauvinism. Some men are misogynists who do not believe in the education of women including their female children and wives. The adherents of the belief that "The place of the woman is in the kitchen" have compounded women's desire for quality education by making things difficult for women when it comes to educational development. Such men prefer to marry illiterates as wives for fear that the educated woman is too assertive, domineering, free and in general a threat to the male-dominated society.

**Gender Differentials in Education:** Alele-Williams (1986) notes that existing data on Nigeria show that at all levels of education, fewer girls than boys are enrolled at school despite the numerical advantage of females. For example, girls drop out more often from school due to pregnancies, early marriages, heavy demand on girls' time to perform household tasks, and economic reasons; and because of limited occupational choices for female students. The

educational imbalance between men and women in Nigeria is due to societal traditions and myths which relegate women's education to the background vis-à-vis men.

**Religious Constraint:** The forces of religion are also partly responsible for the present plight of women's education in Nigeria. None of the three major religions in Nigeria, namely: Christianity, Islam and traditional religions, in practice endorses equality between men and women. Genesis 3:16 is one of the planks at the base of the oppression of the women by men: *In sorrow thou shall bring forth children; and they desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.*

The exemption of women from Priesthood in most Christian denominations further confirms this submission. The practice of *purdah* in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim women to fully benefit from the educational system. Similarly, in traditional religion women must always stay in the background. That perhaps explains why women are usually kept out of shrines and the cults of traditional religions.

**House Keeping, Family and School Life Constraints:** Nigerian society believes primarily in the role model of women as perfect housewives. Most women therefore struggle to be successful housewives. In some situations, such struggles keep women out of the school system. Many women, in their bid to play multiple roles such as house wives, mothers providing house hold labour, worker, often have little time for educational advancement. The female child works thrice as much as, or even more than the male child. This is because house keeping is considered a central feature in the upbringing of the girl child, while the boy child is often free of this time consuming engagement. So when

the chips are down, the boy child has more time for school work than the girl child. House keeping assignments may often make the girl child to become too tired to concentrate on her studies. This may be one of the reasons why the educational wastage rate of girls is often higher than that of boys.

The career development of women is often tailored along specific occupations, traditionally stereotyped as female occupation. Without saying it loud, the school system encourages the boy child to be a tough engineer or a medical doctor, while at the same time encouraging the girl-child to become a gentle nurse or a primary school teacher.

**Traditional/Cultural Constraints:** The culture and traditions of many ethnic groups in Nigeria are full of obvious signs of gender stereotyping. Education for girls right from the very beginning was designed to make them primarily effective mothers and housewives. Hence girls were brought up in the traditional family set-up to be passive, obedient, "ladylike" and always submissive to men. Boys on the other hand, were encouraged to be aggressive, competitive and independent.

A woman is brought up to see marriage as her ultimate goal and ambition. From birth to betrothal, her whole life is just one long preparation for assuming the role of wife and mother. In some ethno cultures in Nigeria, for example, she is molded for a life of anonymity and sacrifice.

One dimension of patriarchy which limits women's economic and educational activities is the prejudice of *purdah* or female exclusion, whereby women are confined to the house and are denied access by tradition and culture to participate in the socio-political development of their society.

**Negative Attitude of Some Parents to Women's Education:** Some parents also have negative attitudes towards women's education, especially illiterate parents who are fond of withdrawing their daughters from school in favour of their sons. To corroborate the issue of discrimination against women education, Ogundusin (1977) observes that,

*“Among the circumstances depriving women of their equal opportunity are the age – old traditional concept of the place of and role of women, the traditional inferiority complex among the women themselves and the societal condemnation of women who dare break through the taboo curtain that keeps women behind the screen”.*

**Stereotypes about Women:** For too long, women had been perceived in various societies, but particularly in the developing world, as second class citizens, objects of the developmental and governance processes. Although women are credited for producing up to seventy percent of the food needs in the developing countries, especially in Africa, and are responsible for looking after the home and children, their contributions have not been adequately acknowledged by society. Indeed, women were never fully recognized as partners in the development processes in their various countries for many years.

Governments, usually male dominated, have consistently tried and in some cases even succeeded, in marginalizing women who constitute about half, or even more, of the total population. Much of the problems associated with the democratic misadventures in majority of the countries in Africa, south of the Sahara, could be traced to the marginalization of the womenfolk.

We have seen that for many years, women, were made to believe that their rightful place was in the

home front; as housewives, producers and caretakers of children. They were to stay at home and inculcate in their children the virtues of life while their husbands carried on with important societal tasks such as politics and governance.

**Unequal Employment Opportunities:** Another serious but subtle constraint is the discrimination against women by employers. It is not strange these days to discover in many advertisements for vacancies that the jobs are exclusively for males; so women (especially the married ones) need not apply. More parents, therefore, do not see any need for sending their female children to school thereby increasing the number of stark illiterates in the society and pulling back the progress and development of the nation, leaving women to become more frustrated and lacking in confidence in themselves.

**Early Marriages:** In some parts of the country, particularly in the North, early marriages are a permanent feature, in which case, girls are given in marriage at the age of between twelve and thirteen years. This condition can lead to serious health hazards, especially the popular VVF condition and other social deprivations, mostly educational in nature. In this case, the girl's opportunities are destroyed. She then misses the chance of furthering her educational career and this no doubt can upset her otherwise, peaceful life.

#### **4.3. Efforts Made so far at Promoting Women's Education in Nigeria**

Many programmes have been used by the Federal Government of Nigeria to promote women's adult and non-formal education. These are:

**Women's Education Programme:** In 1986, the Blueprint on Women Education

in Nigeria was launched, followed by the setting up of Women Education Unit of Federal and State Ministries of Education. These units cater for both rural and urban women who desire to further their education. Attention is also focused on women with special needs such as nomadic and riverine women, women in purdah, dropouts of all categories, especially teenage single parents. The overall aim is to avail all women equal educational opportunities irrespective of their age, locality, creed or social status.

The Women Education Units also runs women's vocational centres in all Local Government Areas in the areas of cloth weaving, tie and dye, farming, food processing and preservation, dressmaking, hair dress, soap-making, cookery, cosmetology, secretarial and compute studies.

Mass Literacy Programme: Nigeria set up in 1991, the National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) charging it with the task of eradicating illiteracy in the country.

Many Christian and Muslim women's organizations are active in offering adult and non-formal educational opportunities to women; so also are many other NGOs such as Officers' Wives Associations of the Nigerian Armed Forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force).

Donor Agencies, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, British Council, Van Leer Educational Foundation, etc all contributed enormously to various educational programmes for women, for example in the UNICEF/FGN Master Plan of Operation for the 1991-95 programme of Co-operation, the education of women is identified as one of the areas of UNICEF's intervention. The plan states that:

*The Education for Women Project will accelerate*

*functional literacy attainment by enhancing access to and the quality of non-formal education for women of child-bearing age and girls above formal primary school age.... The project will provide training in basic literacy and numeracy for women and girls training in basic income-generating and self-enhancing skills and promote health awareness, including nutrition and safe motherhood among them.*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Education is recognized world wide as the fulcrum around which the quick development of any nation revolves. It is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. However, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels. In spite of all the laudable goals, objectives and benefits derived from education, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development.

Considering all the efforts made by the various levels of government-Federal, State and Local, together with non-governmental organizations and donor agencies, there are still more to be done in the area of girls and women education.

The following suggestions, if judiciously and religiously pursued, will therefore, bring about improvement in women's education and ipso facto the attainment of their individual and national development.

### **Initiating an Extensive Enlightenment Campaign:**

The government, non-governmental organizations and public spirited individuals must intensify efforts to change stereotype attitudes, images and expectations of men and women that are inimical to progress. Posters, fliers,

leaflets, brochures are to be widely circulated so as to disseminate the unquantifiable benefits of female education. Press releases, radio and television jingles must be adopted to debunk and demystify some of the unprogressive norms prevalent in our society. The combined effort of civic, social and religious leaders will ensure progress.

#### **Launching of a Curriculum Censoring Board:**

Advertently or inadvertently, curriculum formulators in the past have been predominantly male and hence the gender biases often reflected in textbooks, course contents and examinations. The full involvement of female in the curriculum formulating and censoring board will help detect and remove possible gender bias that may be in the curriculum.

#### **Involving Women in Future Educational Policy Formulation:**

It can not be gainsaid that the deeper the level of involvement of women in formulation of policies of education pertinent to them, the greater the likelihood of coming up with policies that are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the plight of women. It is therefore possible that the reason for the lack of interest of female generally had little or no contribution, the end result is usually a pathology.

#### **Financial Assistance:**

Financial incentive like special scholarship award, soft tuition loans and other financial grants can be specifically granted to women in order to check talented and promising females from drifting away from education.

#### **Pro-women Government Policies:**

Policies such as expanded facilities for "second chance" functional and literacy education to adult women; enforcing existing laws prohibiting hawking and street trading by girls with penalties stipulated for contrary

behaviours; enforcing legal provision of penalties for withdrawal of girls from school for marriage. In addition, reinforcing current non-formal education programmes to provide selective type of learning for specific objectives for adult women and secondary school drop outs and women who desire to further their education.

#### **Research Centers for Women Studies:**

Continuous research into factors affecting the education of women must be launched and supported by appropriate educational research organizations and governmental departments. In service and pre-service education of teachers should be delved into, thereby helping the teachers develop skills to combat stereotyping and raise awareness of the constraints that gender stereotyping imposes on the development of young girls and of society.

- Poverty alleviation programmes should be well articulated, vigorously pursued and objectively carried out so that poverty level of parents will be reduced. This will enable parents to give equal opportunities to their children.

- The clauses in the National Policy on Education (NPE) relating to equal opportunities for all Nigerians should be genuinely executed.

- Political leaders are very important on the issue of women empowerment. There must be sincere action on the part of our leaders that they are actually interested in solving this problem through meaningful programmes. Whatever plans are initiated in this direction should be fully implemented and reviewed periodically. This allows for amendments where necessary.

- Positive attitudes towards women empowerment on the part of all Nigerians would accelerate the process.

- The Universal Basic Education should be vigorously pursued. Adequate data relating to planning facilities and human resources in the form of teachers must be met.

- Schools should be located closer to communities, and community participation especially locally active women should be encouraged. This serves as a precursor to educational growth in the locality.

- Adult literacy programme should be encouraged and adequately supervised.

- In addition, various steps should be taken to rehabilitate girls or women that have taken to social ills like prostitution, fraud and drugs.

- For a well informed citizenry, women and girls need to be encouraged to attend school and to stay in school for longer years to learn science and technology subjects if they are to contribute their best to national efforts for self reliance and national development. It has become apparent under the present economic hardships (realities) that the stereotype image of man as the family's sole bread winner is no longer always true.

- Similarly, the misguided stereotypical division of work into men's and women's jobs must be discarded. The persistence of this misleading sexist categorization of jobs in homes, amongst teachers, and employers of labour is a major discriminatory factor in the tendency among girls and women to acquire inadequate and insufficient education.

- Women, on the other hand must organize themselves to meet the challenges of a positive and meaningful role in the struggle for national emancipation, development and progress through the acquisition of functional education which will usher in a new lease of life in order for us to face squarely the challenges of national development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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